Xf 324.25
42378
25.
6 Apr 22
Pickering
Ent.

THE BENEFIT OF THE BALLOT: WITH The Nature and Use thereof: Particularly in the Republick of VENICE.

by James Harrington

THe Use or Practice of the *Ballot* hath been very Ancient in the Eastern Countries; And *Postellus* conceiveth, that the *Venetian* use of the *Ball*, is the same with that, which was of the Lot in the Commonwealth of *Israel*, and of the *Bean* in *Athens*. *Cicero* himself doth give a very good account, and a very great *Encomium* of the *Table* or *Ballot* of the People of *Rome*; And certainly *Rome* nor *Carthage* had ever attain'd to their Grandeur and Reputation in the World, had it not been for the *Ballot*. By this only Art (we had almost said) the Commonwealth of *Venice* hath preserv'd it self against the most potent enemies for these 1300 Years; and it hath flourished in the greatest splendour of any State in *Europe*.

Where the *Ballotting* is us'd, those States are most free from all Factions and Rebellions.

There, Persons of the most accomplisht Parts are advanc'd for their Integrity and Worth.

There, Virtue is as speedy a Ladder to climbe unto Honour, as Nobility of Birth; and a good Man is as much respected as a great.

Every one giveth his Election and Vote freely, and that without the fear of Great-ones, or Favour to Freinds; But according to the Value and Worth of the Persons, do they give their Suffrages; and for those who are of the most Noble Spirits: Not for persons designing their own private Interest, to the impoverishing of the Publick.

There is not a place for Pensioners, who are the Burs of a Nation, and the Suckers, which hinder the growth of any State.

They are very just in their Rewards and Punishments; which rightly laid, do ballance Government.

By these means their Councellors are of great Honour, and Wisdom; For mean Men make it their Master-piece of Credit, to give venturous Councils, which no great or wise man would or durst: And Princes usually find Instruments more for their Will and Humour, then for their Service and Honour; which never can be so in this State; For they ever prefer safe Councils with Reason, before rash, which only Chance can make prosperous.

Their management of their Treasure is prudent, and their Officers frugal in the disposal of it; Knowing well, that good husbandry may stand with great Honour, as well as Breadth with Height; And certainly nothing doth consume it self like Prodigality; (which some by mistake call Liberty;) For if it be long us'd, it takes away the means to continue it, and consequently it does make a State poor; or else to avoid poverty, it's often enforc'd to oppression, and thereby becomes odious.

It is necessary (like *Venice*,) for every State to have a full Treasure, if it be but for the keeping up of its Reputation abroad; For the power of a State is valued according to the fulness of its Purse, rather than the largeness of its Teritories.

The Officers in that State are but few; and they make choice of such as are knowing: For, being rich, they need not abuse the State themselves; and, being knowing, they will not suffer others to do it.

But in some Monarchies, where there are such multitudes of Officers, (which is a great calamity) they serve for nothing, but to rifle the Princes Purse; and the fuller they fill their Coffers, the more facile is their Justification, when question'd.

Neither are they for making of Parties, or for Debaucheries in Elections; as it is observ'd (to our great grief) in some other places.

There are no Tumults or noise at their Votes or Suffrages, which in some places are so great, that Strangers (hearing the shouts and noise they make,) have conceiv'd themselves to be at *Ephesus*.

That State that useth it, must needs have the greatest advantages against others which use it not: Neither is it possible to be destroy'd but by another State, which useth the same.

Carthage had never been subdu'd by the *Romans*, but that the *Romans* us'd the *Ballot*, as well as they themselves; And that makes us often to think, that *Venice* preserving her ancient Rules and Methods of *Balloting*, must be immortal.

Let us consider, that *Anno* 1508. when the Emperour, and most of the Kings and Princes of *Europe* entred into a League against Her, (by this one practice) how prudently she behav'd her self against them all.

We need but instance the prudent conduct, and the management of their Affairs against the most formidable power of the *Sultan*, which would have been a terrour, if not a Confusion, to the greatest Princes of *Europe*; if we consider the *Ottoman* power, and the continuance of those Wars; And we are apt to conceive, that by this Art they have done more severe execution, and given the greater disturbance to the *Ottaman* Forces, than all the Princes of *Europe* (tho all conspir'd against them) during the Holy War; For by reason of their Divisions, Piques and animosities among themselves (which by the *Ballot* would easily have been prevented) they never effected any Action of Grandeur; or gain'd any place but to lose again.

Whether the *Ballot* be so practicable in a Monarchy, where all great Offices and Honours are at the disposal of a Prince, and by Him conferred as a reward of Services; We must submit that to their pleasures.

But certainly to that State wherein it is entertain'd, the advantages which thereby accrew, must needs be very great; and would be the best expedient to establish Monarchy for ever; For Monarchy can never be destroy'd, but by Factions and Divisions, which can never happen in that State where the *Ballot* is used.

Galgee the King of *Mindao*, a Prince who had many Kingdoms and great Dominions, being in a War; and for the better carrying on of the same, assembled his Grand *Conciliado*, or *Convention of States*, (for without them no Money could be rais'd,) which consisted of *Magnifico's* and *Populo's*; (as with us in *England*,) that is, of *Lords* and *Commons*. They being assembled, granted many Royal Aids to the King; But being continued together over long, they fell into Parties, (as great Bodies are very apt to do.) Some accusing the most eminent Ministers of State for their ill Councel, and male administration of publick Affairs; Others opposing the granting of any further Aid, affirming that Taxes and Impositions ought to be in the State, as Sails in a Ship, not to charge and over-lade it, but to conduct and assure it.

The King finding so many of them to be Troublesom, the better to obtain his own ends, took them off by Honours, Preferments and Pensions; But thereby the King became Indigent, the Subjects miserably poor, and the great Council (which ever us'd to be a Medicine to heal up any Rupture in a Princes Fortune,) were grown worse than the Malady, broken into Parties, because others were prefer'd in Honours before them, who, (as they conceiv'd) were much inferior to themselves in Merit; and commonly the People cannot endure excessive Fortune any where so ill, as in those who have been in equal Degree to them; and nothing begets more disdain, then to see others go before them in the Princes Favour, who come behind them in Virtue and Worth.

The

The Kingdom being in this Distemper, and the King incircled in so many Infelicities; *Vanly*, a *Persian*, an excellent Person, and a great friend to *Galgee*, advis'd him not to Dissolve his great Council, (for in that Juncture it might hazard his Dominions; and prove fatal to him, it being the great Idol of the People,) but to continue them during his Life; and the better to reconcile all Interests, to cause 30 to be chosen out of the *Conciliado* to be of his *Council Di Stado*, (or *Privy Council* as we call it;) whereof 15 to be *Lords*, and 15 to be *Commons*; and all those to be Elected by themselves by the *Ballot*, out of the most Virtuous and publick Spirited persons amongst them: And every Year 10 of those to be remov'd out of the *Council Di Stado*, and to return to the *Conciliado* or *Great Council*; and by the *Ballot* to make choice of other 10 of the most Eminent amongst them for Integrity and Parts.

King *Galgee* gave an exact observance to his sober Council, and by these means he united all Parties in his Council; and there was such a due administration of Justice in his Dominions, and such virtuous Persons were chosen for the management of Publick Affairs, that in a short time King *Galgee* became so potent, and belov'd of his People, (for that Prince, who will gain their affections, must give them ease and plenty,) that when *Badurius*, King of *Cambaia*, invaded *Mindao* with an Army of 150000 Horse, and 500000 Foot; that Prince, by the assistance of his own Subjects, and of some mercenary *Persians*, and *Zagathays*, defeated and destroy'd that great Army.

Certainly, as it was great wisdom in *Vanly* to give this Council, so it was great prudence in King *Galgee* to follow it; for the great Council consisting (or at least presum'd to consist) of the most wise, and sufficient Persons, of all his Dominions: the Privy Council, and others, the great Officers of State, being, by the *Ballot*, chosen out of the most eminent of them for Parts, and Integrity, there must needs be a rare felicity of Government.

There could be no complaints of the male-administration of the Ministers of State, (which usually makes the greatest noise) they being virtuous and wise, and chosen out of the *Ballot* by themselves; neither were they, who were advanc'd to honour, envied (which is ever an Attendant upon Greatness) by any of the *Conciliado*; because they themselves, in time, might attain to that dignity, if their wisdom and integrity should inworthy them.

Which was a rare happiness; for great men may secure themselves from guilt, but not from envy: And we have observ'd, that the greatest in trust of Publick Affairs, are ever shot at by the aspirings of those, who deem themselves less in imployment, than they are in merit.

Therefore it highly concerns great Ministers of State, to keep Sentinel; for every step they tread is pav'd with Fate, and every misfortune of theirs commonly procures them as much dishonour, as if they had been perfidious in their practice, and their unhappiness is deem'd for a crime.

Therefore let those, who are rais'd to the height of their greatness, consider, that Princes Favours are always perillous; and that it's a difficult thing to stand long firm upon Ice, and that the Fall (how gentle soever) will never suffer them again to rise.

But King *Galgee*, by his prudent Government, had a peculiar felicity in his Reign, and establish'd his Dominions upon the Center of a flourishing happiness; yet we cannot but observe one great Solœcism in point of State, in King *Galgee*'s rewarding so many persons, for being troublesome unto him; for that Prince, who does practise it, shall find, that no sooner he takes off one, but presently another gets up; and it will animate others to do so, when they find such encouragement for being troublesome; and at last, if the Prince be not able to gratifie all, (which is impossible for him to do) it may turn to the dissolution of the Government.

But certainly King *Galgee* could have no kindness for those persons, he had so advanc'd, (Preferment being the reward of Virtue, and not to gratifie disquiet Spirits) and the People, who are ever jealous of their Rights, must look upon them, as betrayers of their Liberties; and the end of such persons (if one well observe it) is commonly very miserable. And the Subjects never so much repine at their Contributions, as when they observe them to be the rewards of persons, to whom Fortune, not Merit, gives a growth.

It was a Remark of *Henry* the Fourth of *France*, that such persons, who made the greatest noise in the Parliament of *Paris*, were men of the least sufficiency; but they had soft tongues, and hard faces, they did not vent their own conceits, but the projections and designs of others; and they were like hollow singing Bullets, which usually flew but half way to the Mark; whereas the Designer doth execution, but makes no report.

It was afterwards observ'd, that the Successors of this great *Galgee*, not imitating his excellent Arts of Government, and neglecting the choice of the great Ministers of State by the *Ballot*; by reason whereof men of no sufficiency were promoted to the highest Offices of State, which gave discouragement to others of more desert; and, by their male-administration, discontent to all:

Thereby

English 18 Mar 22 Pickering & Chatto 125

f 46142

Thereby their Countrey in a short time was overcome by *Merhamed* the *Mogul Tartar*. Whereas if they had observ'd the prudentials of *Galgee*, and us'd the *Ballot*, (which had been a Wall of Steel to them) they had been invincible.

There is no Government but this of the *Ballot* may suit with, if the Prince, and his great Council, please to make a Law for the practice of it; neither is it any diminution to the Prince's Dignity, to depart with the conferring of Offices; when, by the use of the *Ballot*, all things will multiply to Honour, and the aggrandizing of his Name.

For many times it's as fatal to a Prince to have bad Officers under him, as for himself not to be good.

The Revolt, which was made from *Richard* the Second, was more for the displeasure taken against Sir *John Bushy*, Sir *William Bagot*, and Sir *Henry Green*, &c. who manag'd the publick Offices under him, than against the King himself.

For Princes, in the Elections of their Officers, do more respect their particular affections, and to serve their turns, than the sufficiency of the persons elected; and more Kingdoms and Dominions have been overthrown by the ill management of Officers, than by the severity of the greatest Tyrants; and the Investiture of the meanest persons to great Commands, hath often prov'd fatal to the greatest undertakings.

An Instance whereof is that of *James* the Fifth of *Scotland*, who, in the year 1542. invaded *England* with an Army of 60000 Horse and Foot; and was met with the Lord *Wharton*, then Warden of the North-West Marches; the Battel being ready to joyn, one Sir *Oliver Synclere*, (the *Scottish* King's Minion, but of no great Extraction, or Skill in Martial Affairs,) was by the King's Order proclaim'd General; which the *Scottish* Nobility took in such indignation, that they threw down their Arms, and suffer'd themselves to be taken Prisoners; there being not one man slain on either side: Whereas if they had made choice of a Captain-General themselves by the *Ballot*, one, who had good skill in Martial Affairs, and whom they would willingly have follow'd; what Actions of Grandeur they might have effected, we leave it to the judicious to consider.

The Practice, and Method, which the State of *Venice* useth in their Elections by the *Ball*, may be read at large in *Contarini*, *Gianotti*, and *Sansovinus*; but in case these Authors be wanting, Mr. *John Ray*'s Observations, printed *Anno* 1673. will fully inform you, who hath (*folio* 157.) exactly collected out of the said Authors, all the Observables in their Elections; which would be over-tedious to express here, the same having been perform'd so particularly, and excellently, by that learned Gentleman.

We will here set down, in a few lines, somewhat of the Practick Part (for it is us'd in some Cases with more nicety, than in others) in great Councils of State; we will mention the most facile here.

The Electors being assembled in some convenient Place, (as a great Hall, *&c.*) the doors are shut up, and the Prime Officers, who assemble, or call together the Electors, keep the Keys till the Election be over.

The *Syndick*, or chief Officer for that purpose, takes the *Ballot*-Box, and opens it in the view of all the Company, to see that it is empty, and without secret Conveyances; then placeth it on a Table for that purpose, at one end of the Room, and calls such of the Company as he thinks may make most dispatch; gives to each a Ball in the sight of the People, a little Ball made of fine Linnen, as at * *Venice*; he puts into the Box, either the Affirmative, or Negative, and so departs to one side from the rest; and then he calls the next, and does the like to him, and so of the rest, till all are call'd; all, who have voted, stand apart by themselves.

* *In some Places they use Beans.*

The Box is somewhat long, and hath a partition in the midst, the which hath two holes to drop the Balls in, which are Taper-wise, broader at the top, and narrower at the bottom; the right-hand hole is for the * Affirmative, and the left for the Negative.

* *They may also be distinguished by the Colours, black and white.*

And, because that no man shall know on which side a man puts his Ball, (who is giving his Vote) there is a place roundish made in the Box, to put in the Hand and Arm, almost half way to the Elbow, so as the Hand being in, the Party may let his Ball drop as he pleaseth.

When all have done Ballotting, the Box is open'd, and what is in the Affirmative noted down.

Then the next Competitor is Ballotted for, as the former, and so of the rest; and he who hath most Votes in the Affirmative, is elected.

All very easily perform'd in a short time, without noise, without tumult, without animosities, and the most deserving always is elected.

FINIS.